

the first
lecture

Breaking the Taboos



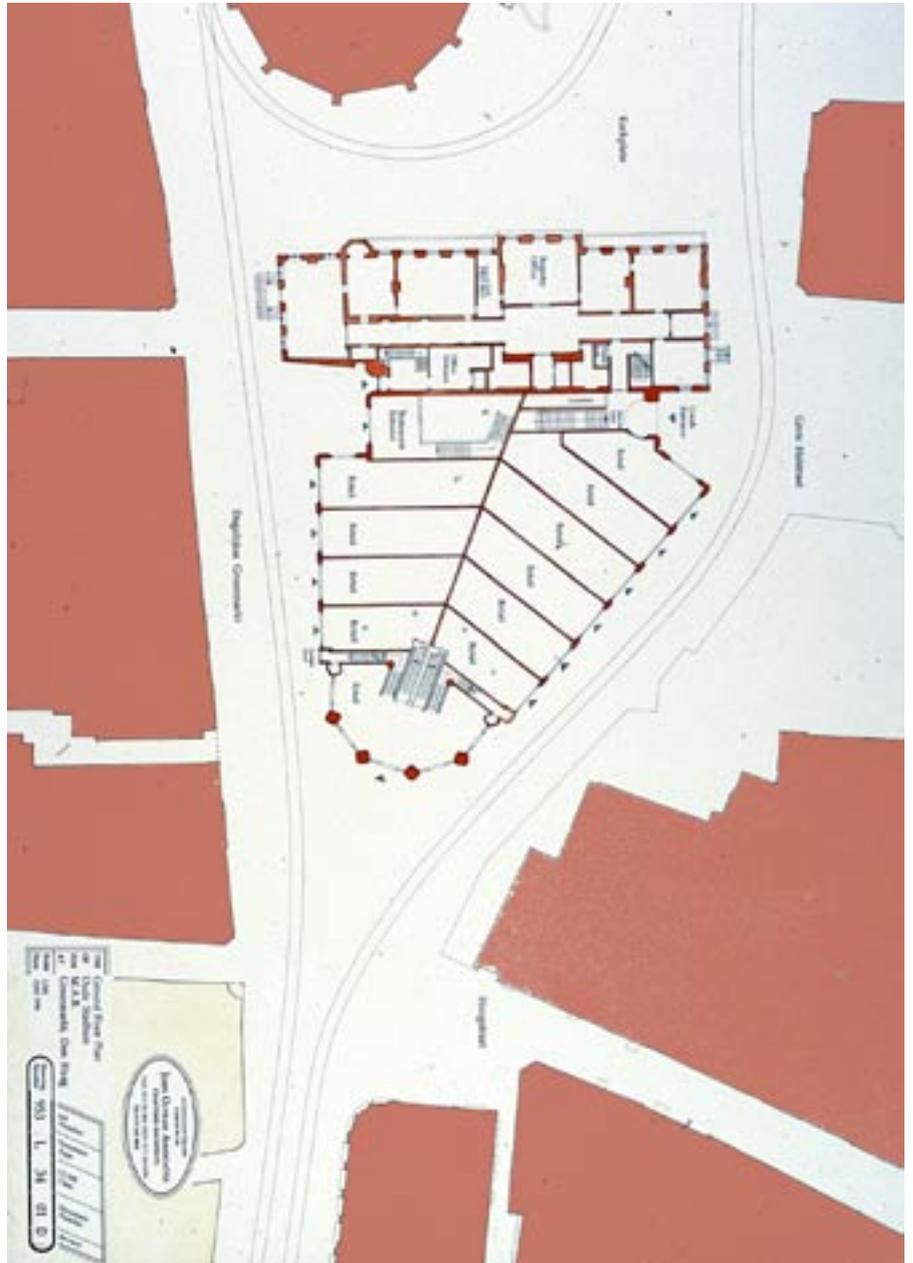
People think that monuments usually apply to the dead. But why should the dead have all the best buildings? What about some beautiful buildings for the living? Why not have a new sort of Monument.....

ONE FOR THE LIVING THAT WOULD PAY RENT - AS



Groenmarkt Retail Block
John OutramAssociates

Groenmarkt is 'greens-market', the vegetable-market of Den Haag, small capital of the Dutch Republic, birth-place of Western marine trade, colonialism, capitalism and everything that London eventually made her own and into her departed empire. The site of the rotunda was a church, a meat market, a police-station and concrete box of a 1960's town hall. The quatrefoil columns bear an 'ontogenetic history', in their full splendour, only on the North.



The 'monument' of the great rotunda is not separated out from the rest of the city. It is half buried into its mass, as advised by the only creative urbanist of recent times, Camillo Sitte, of late 19C Vienna; a man who had the wit to grasp what was right and wrong in city-planning, but lacked the theory to argue for it.

**LIVING PEOPLE
MUST.....**

**YET STILL
BE A
MONUMENT**

As the columns wind round to the South, into daylight, the pattern dies away. Ideas glow brightest in the dark.

But surely life is too fast-moving, unpredictable, and messy, to fit into a monument.

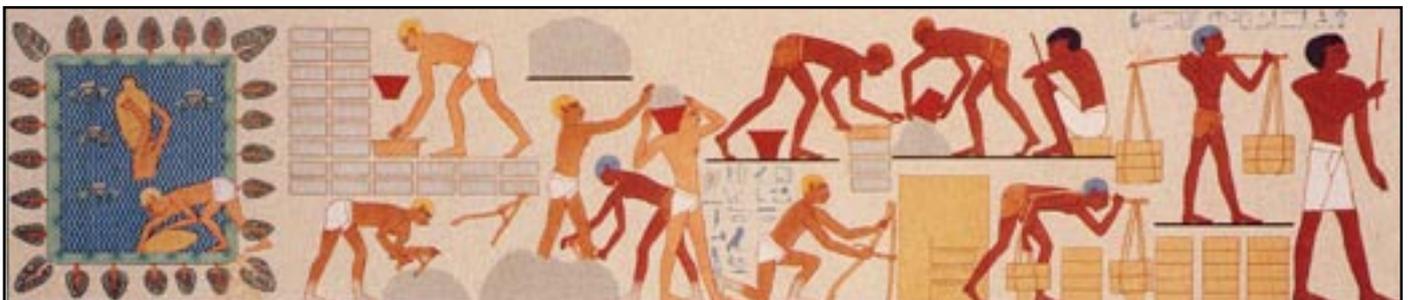


*Isle of Dogs: Stormwater Overflow Pumping Station. Required structural life - 100 years.
Physical function - to save the Isle of dogs from being flooded with raw sewage when it rains in Mayfair.
A monument to summer storms - opened on a Thors-day.*

THEN WHY BUILD FOR IT?

Why not drive one's sheep towards the storm clouds, hoping for rain?

*Farmers canalise the waters, dig, sow, weed and harvest.
Farmers invest capital and reap its interest. To farm is to foresee
the future. Capitalism is a building which monumentalises a
future of steady rents.*



How do we escape from this prison, this oppression of a predestined future, labouring to pay for capital from cradle to grave?

There is only one way.

It is to delight in it.



The project was to find a use for the largest brick building in Europe, Battersea Power Station. The Brief was a complex of retail, entertainment hotels etc. JOA won the competition for this £M500 project with a 'monumentalisation' of the vast internal, windowless, space that had its skylighting blocked by a roof of cinemas.

It is to draw deep pleasures from its predictable ritual. It is to make this predestined life into a rite that realises our profoundest needs and desires. It is to 'monumentalise' it - absolutely.



A culture confident enough to design such a huge, and 'popular', project, while remaining complex and authentic does not exist today. JOA were asked to work 'under' designers from Las Vegas. JOA designed and then resigned.

A problem with the original, canonic, **Al.** monument was



Pyramid of Chephren at Gizeh. Description de l'Egypte

its extravagantly solid construction...

The Ancient Greeks, practical as ever, got the heavy pyramid-pyre out of the way by hoisting it up onto columns. Then because their religion was politics, in the sense of the life of their 'Poleis', or city-state, they invited their gods out onto a balcony so they could see and be seen.





"The Golden Age", Karl Friedrich Schinkel

But when push came to shove, it was still a lot of solid stone for the builders to workout their 'pecs.



Karl Haller von Hallerstein



Nelly the Dancer Nikolska semi-nude in the Parthenon. 1925.

EVEN SO IT WAS GOOD TO HAVE SOME SPACE (AMONGST THE COLUMNS), TO GET ON WITH LIVING LIKE THE ANCIENT HELLENES.

THIS IS A PICTURE OF AN EGYPTIAN CLIENT WHO WAS THINKING:-

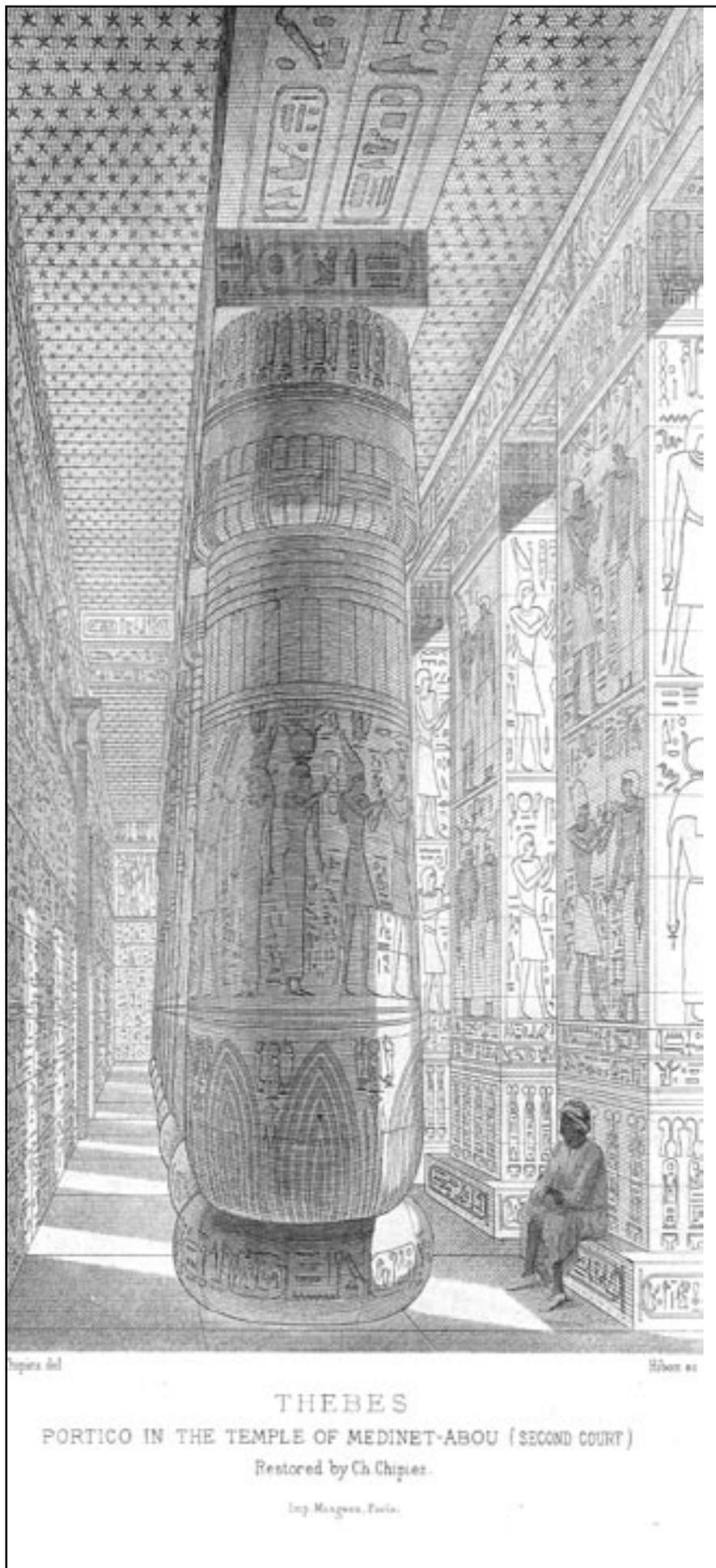
"Why do they have to be quite so large? Surely I don't have to have a column this big in a room this small?"

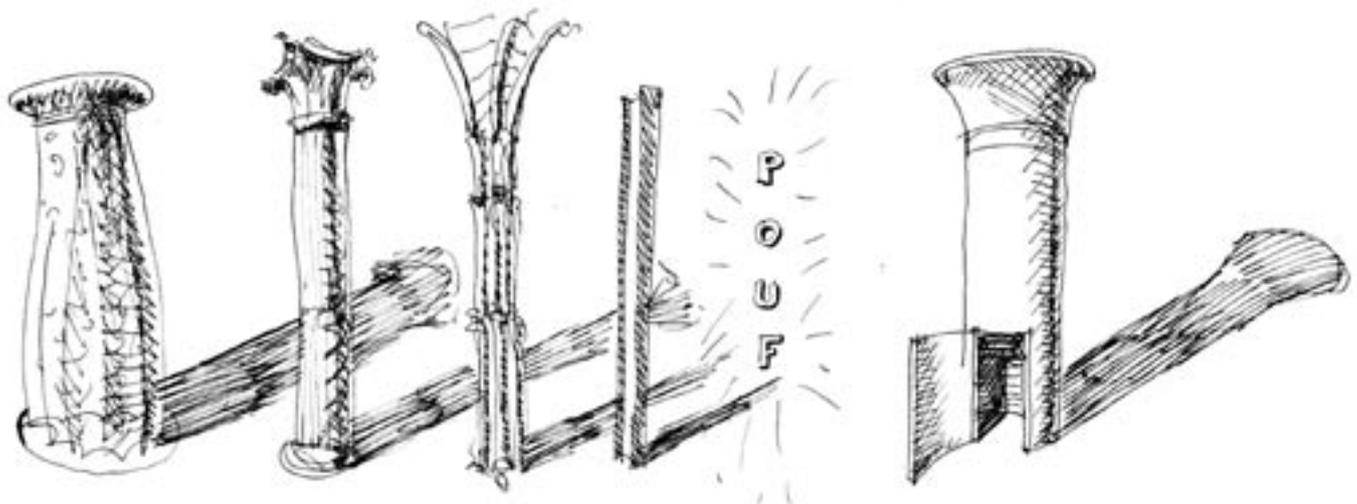
"My Net to gross is ruined"

HE ASKED HIMSELF, WHILE LOOKING THOUSANDS OF YEARS INTO THE FUTURE (AS EGYPTIANS DO): -

"Is there something that other people know about columns that I do not?"

Why do we go on building them?"

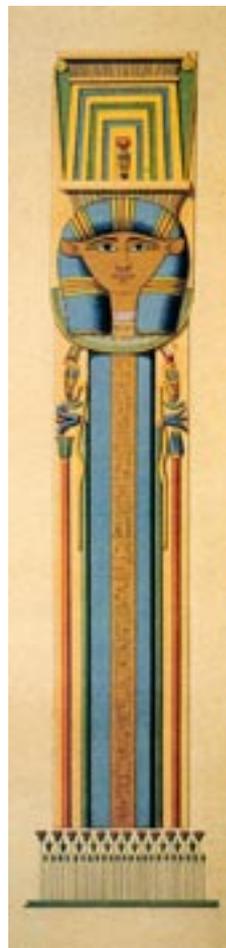




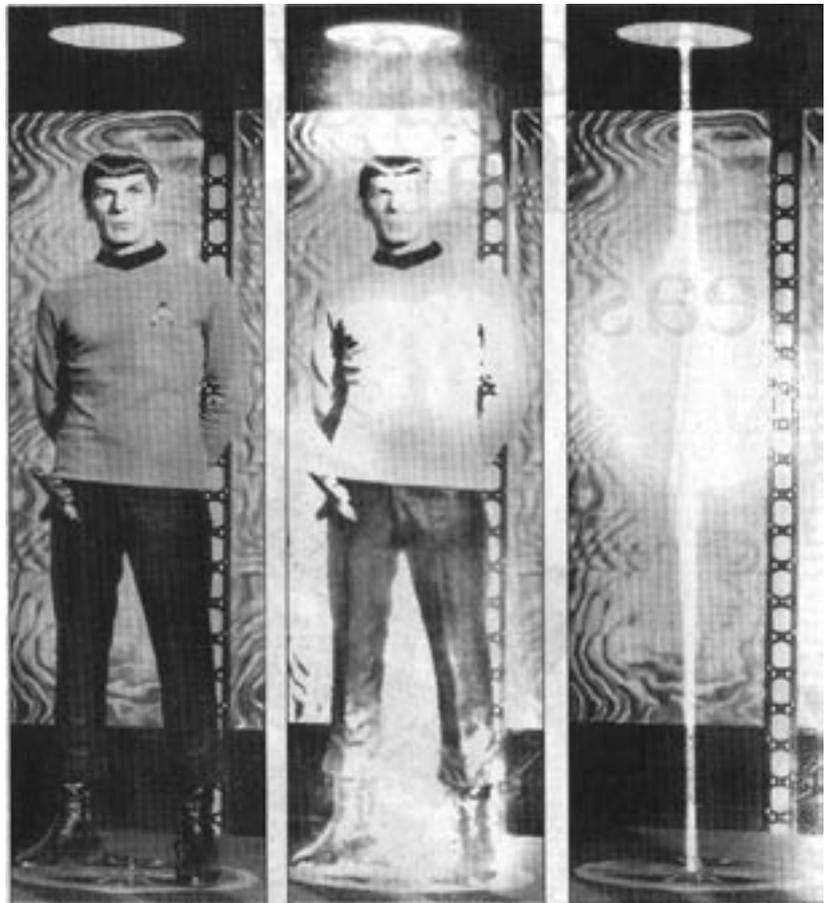
If the history of Architecture over thousands of years has been that of the 'disappearing' of the column - then how, and why, have JOA 'reappeared' it - bigger and brighter than ever?

It is because columns make us feel good about ourselves. The architectural column is an anthropomorph, with a head, a foot, and a 'trunk' in between.

To 'monumentalise' is to pleasure. What gives more pleasure than the vanity of Being?



Col Isiaque:
Prisse d'Avannes



Going, going... Star Trekology beas quantum teleporters, which 'send' only one atom at a time

The etymology of Beam derives from 'to be', the 'columna lucis' is the thunderbolt of the gods.

The column projects man's being into the world
"To be, or not to beam?" is the question of Being.

*There is another reason for bringing back the column. Apart from satisfying man's deepest desires, **Monuments must feel solid and enduring.** But what is solid today when, as Baudrillard proclaimed of the twentieth century: "All that is solid melts into air?"*

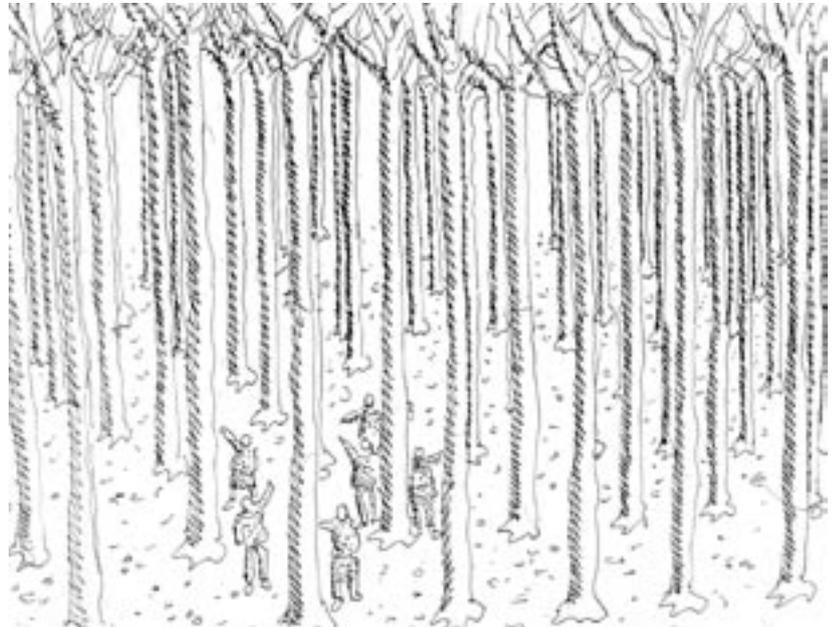
You have crashed, after flying under heavy rain-clouds, onto a high plateau covered in thick jungle. You find yourselves in a trackless forest, with a porous crust through which the rainfall sinks away.

One tree follows another. One space succeeds another without difference. You walk this way and that through a space of eternal sameness like a mirrored hall of reflections. No future comes into view. Nor does the past exist in a forest where nothing seems to disappear or be left behind. You experience an eternal succession of present moments. You lose the sense that time is passing by. Trapped in the nightmare world of Infinity, you experience the time before Time, itself, existed.

After a long day's wandering, you place your foot into yet another swampy patch. Looking down, you see that this water is actually flowing. You bend down to place your fingers in the stream.

Suddenly, flashing into the eye of your memory you see this little stream flowing to the edge of the trackless plateau to tumble off the high cliffs. Standing on its edge, you see it collect others and join into a river which flows lazily along a gentler incline, to pass, glinting, towards the far horizon to debouch into the infinite ocean.

This small signal, with its feeble pressure forcing its will upon your cold fingers, signals the entire progression of a river, down its valley, flowing out of the nightmare world of the suspension of Time.



Lost in the Forest of Infinity, in the time before Time had begun to pass.



The discovery of the 'arrow of time' and its flow down the 'river of life'.



From Source to Sea, via the Valley, he sees the Displaced Crossing, the Arched and Towered Bridge and the Delta.

Architecture is the only Medium in which one may, as was the ambition of the Philosopher Edmund Husserl, reify Time. That is to make Time real and physical and a part of bodily experience. Architecture can not only reify Time but the many sorts of Time.

In Architecture one walks into ideas.

For if one cannot walk into an idea, then it is not Architecture. It is a more trivial medium, like Theatre, Film, Poetry, Music or Graphics, whose territory is incorporeal and conceptual.

Architecture is about Space, as is commonly protested. For when one buys a building what does one buy if not rentable space? The 20C came to believe that Existence preceded Essence. This would seem to imply that Space precedes Time, for what is Space if not the Place of Matter?

But what of Nothing?

ST. AUGUSTINE PROPOSED THAT GOD, BEFORE HE MADE ANYTHING, MADE NOTHING.

Behind the 'event-horizon' of the Big Bang lies neither Space nor Time, but the place of 'un-time'.

If Architecture can reify this Place then we must award Architecture the power and dominion accorded to the primordial and the primary.



Claude Lorraine: "The rest on the flight from Egypt." Any part of the 'river-valley' projects a narrative from the birth of the Water-way to its death in the Ocean. It includes many 'event-horizons', such as the ones we see here of Mountain, Forest, City and Arched Bridge.

The two figures which make up the **ground-plan of many monumental compositions** in the Architecture of every age and culture are the:-

Forest of Infinity AND THE Valley of Time.

THE EMPIRE OF THE FOREST SECURES FOR THE MONUMENT THE MOST SECURE OF ALL FOUNDATIONS, THAT OF NEGATION - OR NOTHING.

The Republic of the Valley inscribes the monument with the space of 'lived time'.

A river is a single thing, like a life, which must flow without interruption, one particle after the other, till it dissipates into the sea.

But there are, along its course, many 'event-horizons'.



"Imago Terrarum", Painting by Carl Laubin, from an iconography by John Outram, describing the story-lines of the JOA competition design for the rebuilding of Bracken House, the Headquarters of the Financial Times, in the City of London. The iconography of the design is grafted onto a scaled section through the actual building.

THIS IS A 'DANGEROUS' PAINTING

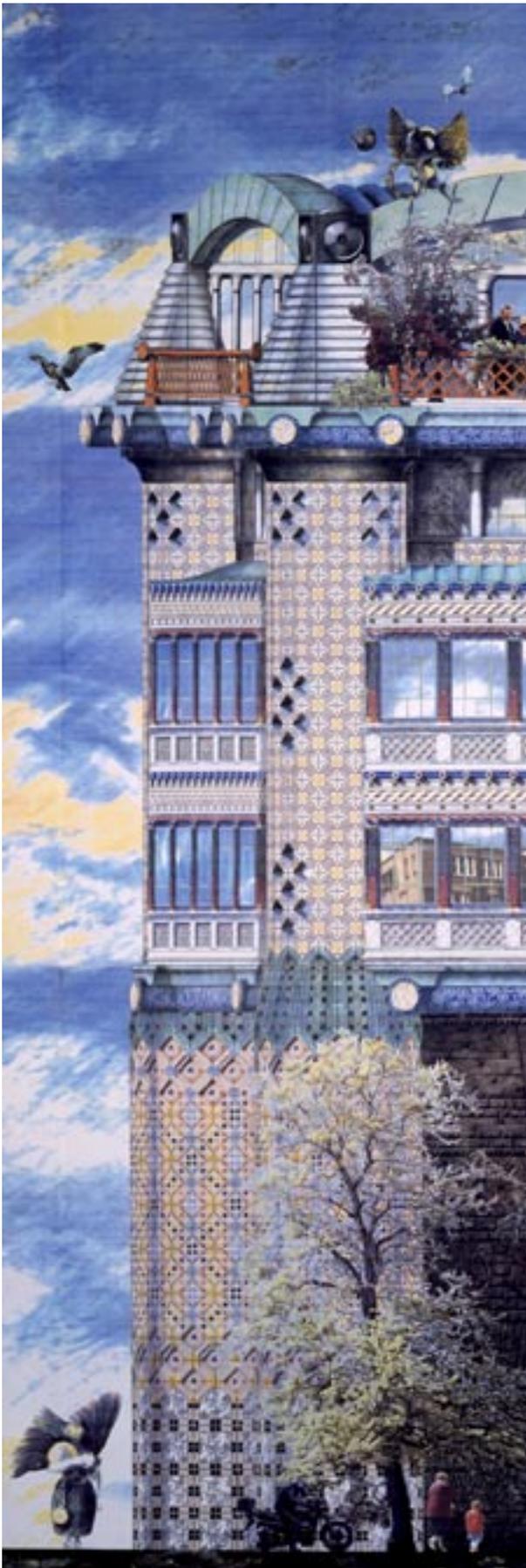
I asked the architect-artist Carl Laubin to paint the 'meaning' of JOA's design for the competition to rebuild Bracken House. As can be seen from the section cut through our design, illustrated below, the River of Time has been cut through the Forest of Infinity, bringing two of the essential story-lines of the monument into a working office-building.

*It is a 'dangerous' image because it falls into the 'Latin' fallacy which has bedevilled Western Art, ultimately causing its downfall at the end of the 19C. The 'River' and the 'Forest' are only natural analogues for certain ideas about TIME. As *ideas*, they are best realised in a more 'art-ificial' medium.*

Art = Artifice



Long section through the design for Bracken House which was used for the painting above.



ART IS CONCEPTUAL.
CONSTRUCTION IS PHYSICAL.
THEY HAVE BEEN JOINED
IN THE MEDIUM OF
ARCHITECTURE, OVER THE
MILLENNIA OF CIVIL HISTORY,
FOR THE SAKE OF MAXIMUM
EFFECT.

But painting and construction split away from each other after the late 19C collapse of the Western Architectural tradition. No longer supported by an architectural framework, painting turned into 'media studies' and died. Architecture, no longer foregrounding painting and the decorative arts, was reduced to an elegant, but conceptually vacuous, construction.

Monuments can not be made in an Architecture which has no conceptual capability. This is because monuments please the mind as well as the body.

Indeed, when one thinks of the long association of monuments with the dead, one thinks how suitable they are for the living.

In that only a living person can entertain ideas.

JOA design for Stanhope securities at 200 Queen Victoria Street, in the City of London. exhibited, with Stirling, Foster and Rogers, in 1992, at the first Venice Architectural Biennale .

So why was painting, the medium of **thinking**, corralled away inside galleries, and museums?

Why with all the brilliance of 20C 'modern' art (which introduced novelties capable of revitalising a Western Art that had died) was the 20C lifespaces not intellectualised with graphics and decoration of architectural scale, thereby rendering it fit for an intelligent being, the product of several millenia of cultural evolution?

And why were the ever-more gigantic constructions of the 20C reduced to merely physical works of material engineering?

AND WHY WAS IT THAT,
IN BETWEEN THESE TWO
DIVORCÉES,
THEIR RE-MARRIAGE
IN ARCHITECTURE WAS
TABOOED?



Daniel Libeskind's 1996 architecture for the '20C Extension' to the V&A Museum. Engineered by Cecil Balmond's formal algorithms into lumpen pattern-slabs of brown matter.

The simple answer is fear. In the 20C the entire citizenry finally stepped onto the Fore-stage. The elites of the 20C feared the weight of this huge population - its culture, its economic predominance and its politics. Karl Kraus, a member of the famed Vienna Circle that included Wittgenstein and Loos, said, in 1912,

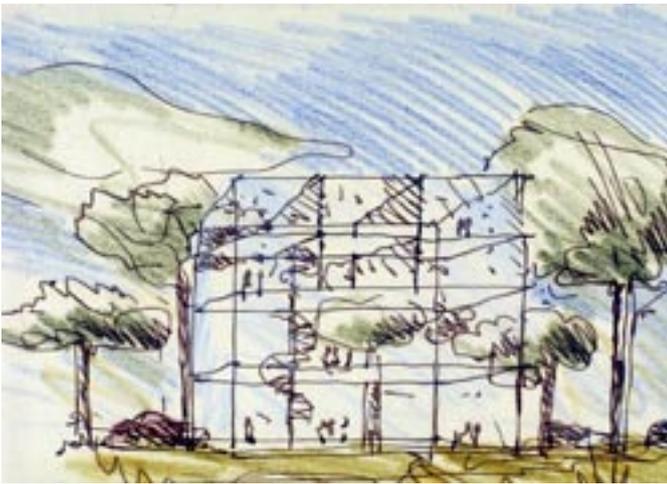
"If anyone has anything to say: please step forward and remain silent".

The lifespaces of the Aristocracies, Theocracies, and Plutocracies all projected their elite users through a full-blooded Architecture, employing art, ornament and painting. The architecture of the 20C, which ought to have projected the ethics of a newly-enfranchised citizenry, covered itself in cement dust, wood-grain, pipes, bolts, slashes, slices, shards and anything which would avoid presenting ideas, as such.

Art was made a private affair.

Construction became the province of mechanics.

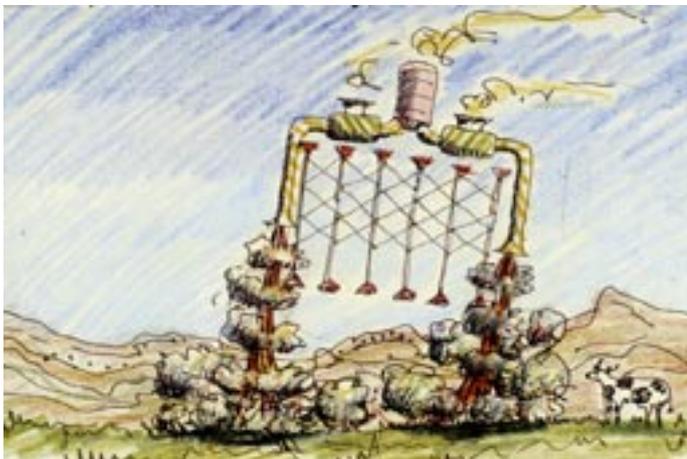
Architecture vanished and the Citizen was reborn as the Consumer.



At first, in the 1950s, after the ending of Art Deco and the Moderne, Mies ran away from reality by proposing the invisible building - made of crystal.



Then in the 1970s, the running became literal. Hi-tech buildings were always photographed with a foreground of unmown grass - as if they had just jetted-in.....



.....and were about to lift off, which would at least make the cows look up. Oh, and the cows were always black-and-white.



Finally, in the 1990s, Architecture was invaded by tribes of intellectuals. They had scented a large cultural territory awash with money and entirely void of theory. Their first act was to outlaw Architecture. This got rid of Architects and whatever it was that they knew, leaving the field wide open for immigrants from musicology, sociology, pugilism and so on.

So as to distract the citizenry from the fact that the lifespace of the 20C was not to monumentalise any reference to their 'arrival upon the scene', a story-line was adopted which made it clear that the huge quantity of construction carried out after the '39-'45 war, was not really 'there' at all.

The message of late 20C architecture was either:-

- the Miesian:** "I'm not really here",
- or the Hi-tech:** "Not for for very long at least",
- or the Deconstructed:** "I'm about to collapse, so don't bother me".

Professor Kenneth Frampton, historian of Modernity, has a simpler explanation.

He argues from 'technology'. Architects like this viewpoint, they think it gives them an 'edge'. But the Professor's problem is that he thinks that at the end of the 20c

Architecture is impossible.

Six pages before the end of Frampton's magisterial 387-page "Studies in Tectonic Culture" he refers to a less ambitious book, by R. Gregory Turner, titled "**Construction Economics and Building Design: an Historical Approach**": New York, Van Nostrand & Rheinhold, 1986.

Gregory Turner reports that the massive and solid building structure, which, at the turn of the 19c, constituted 83% of value, has now fissured into several distinct and separate parts, each with its own technology administered by specialist Engineers. The only part whose fraction of cost remained the same, for 100 years, at 12.5%, was the foundation.

Firstly, the biggest redistribution of resources has been the 'spend' on mechanical services specified by Environmental Engineers. This fraction of budget has expanded twelvefold, over the 20c, from from 3% to 35%.

Secondly, the mountainous, body of the 19c building has been whittled down to a skeleton of frames between which stretch thin floors of steel and cement. This 'anti-gravity' structure, now reserved to specialist Structural Engineers, consumes a further 20% of budget. It replaces the thick, load-bearing, 19c, walls, both interior and exterior, that carried short-span floors. *Thirdly, a new technology of lightweight interior partitions and suspended ceilings has grown up to cover-over all the tinny mechanical equipment.*

This joins together, in the manner of the paper walls in Japanese houses, the long horizontal intervals between thin steel columns. These partitions have become managerial status-symbols. They are beautifully engineered and finished like automobiles, so that even though they have become light, thin, and far from durable (but economical of floor space), they now consume 20% of the building budget. This also has been, like the skeleton frame, "deducted" from the Architect's 83% budget for the solid, meaty, bulk of 19c stone, brick, wood and soft, thick plaster.

These three excisions from the Architect's previously solid medium total 75% of Budget.

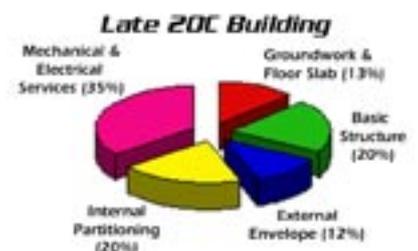
All that is then left, according to Turner, above ground, to spend on the 'external skin' (as it is called in the trade) which will cover-over the 'public face' (or facade), of this highly-engineered, relatively new, interior machinery, is a mere 12% of budget.



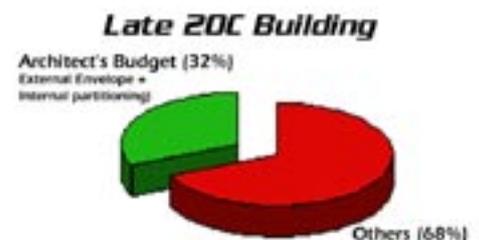
The Budget analysis of a 19c structure, built by on-site craftsmen.



The Architect had his pencil onto 83% of Budget -giving everything an 'architectural culture'.



Budget breakdown of a late 20c structure, manufactured off-site, 'assembled' on site by craftsmen, and designed mainly by Engineers.

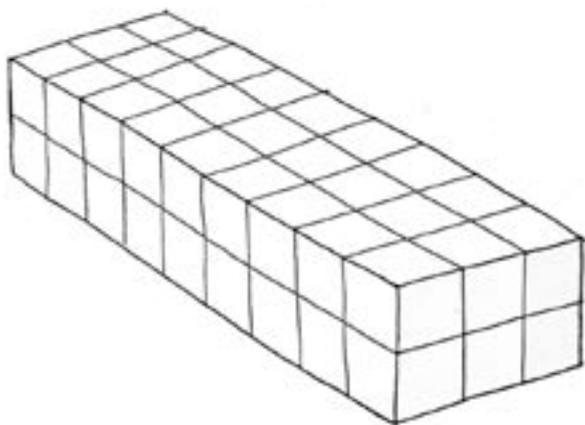


The Architect is displaced. His pencil touches almost nothing. Architectural culture (along with the Architect), vanishes.

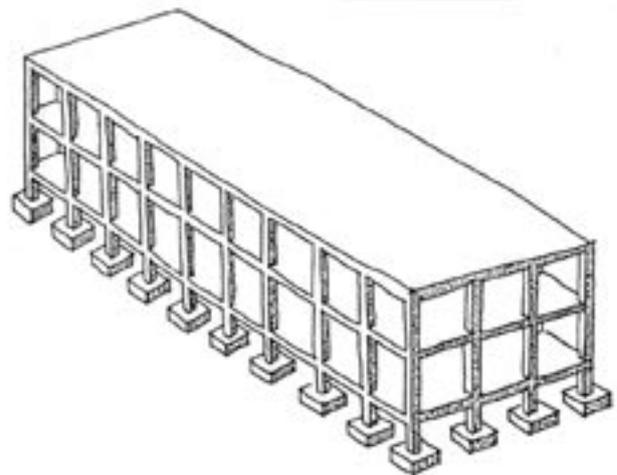
THE ARCHITECT MUST STAND BEFORE THE 9,000 YEARS OF HIS MEDIUM'S HISTORY - NAKED EXCEPT FOR THIS FIG-LEAF OF A PAPER HANGER'S BANKROLL.

Can it be any surprise that, in the USA, many large firms of Architects have been bought out by consortia of the Engineering Consultants that now spend at least 67.5% of Budget, entirely without the Architect's control and participation? The previously all-powerful "man of taste and education" is now relegated to conversations with cladding manufacturers about the depth and frequency of what the Americans call "reglets". These are the grooves between the inoffensive planes of what Frampton's colleague, Vernooy, calls, mourning the loss of tectonic culture, "machine-produced veneers".

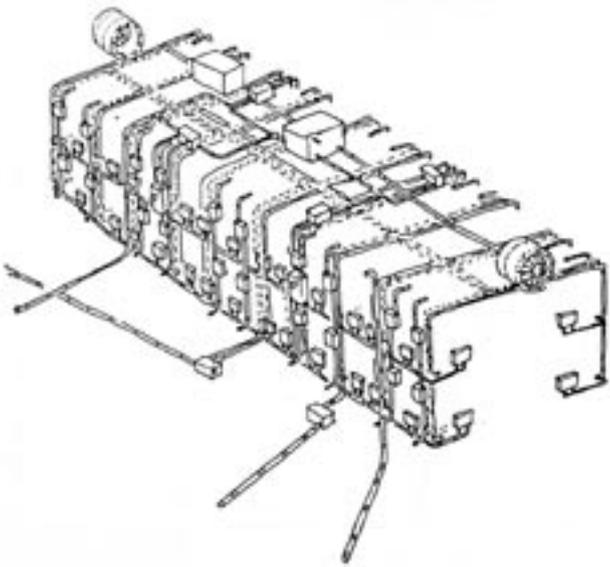
'Yet by 1985, during all of this sad collapse of the 20C project for an 'Architecture Autre' whether Brutalist, Mechanist, Purist, Techist, Naturalist or Deconstructivist, JOA had already built a commercial project which had broken the basic taboo upon the use of Architecture as such, or as the Savants would say: "as found". I show below how we used the real 20C industry to "recover even more of a building to the Architect's pencil than had been the case before 1900:



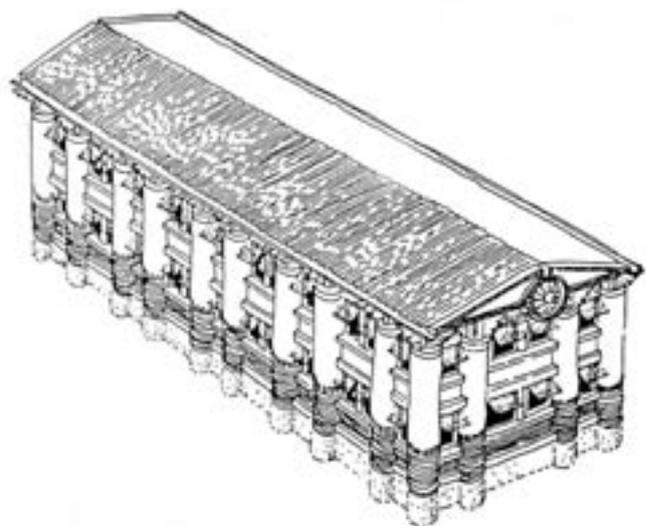
Step 1: Think of what one wants a building to be - a load of boxes called rooms. No surprise here. (The Letting Agent's view)



Step 2. Hold it all up. Columns are cheaper than beams. So use lots of skinny ones - like bones in fish. (The Structural Engineer's view)



Step 3. Wrap it all in mechanical utilities. Hang them outside so as to keep them out of the usable space. (The Mechanical and Electrical Engineer's view).



Step 4. Wrap the whole thing in a durable, solid, low-maintenance, sound-and heat resistant skin of monumental architecture. (the Architect's view).

In late-20C London's suburbia it proved **easy to show that **Monumental Architecture** was possible - even in a merely **'touchy-feely tectonics'**.**

In 1983 JOA was asked to refurbish some 20-year-old buildings for Harp Heating/United Services, a general construction company. The site was on the M25 orbital freeway of London - at Swanley. The 'new' buildings as purchased showed up as technically valueless if not materially non-existent - in short perfect examples of the "I'm not really here" style of the 20C.

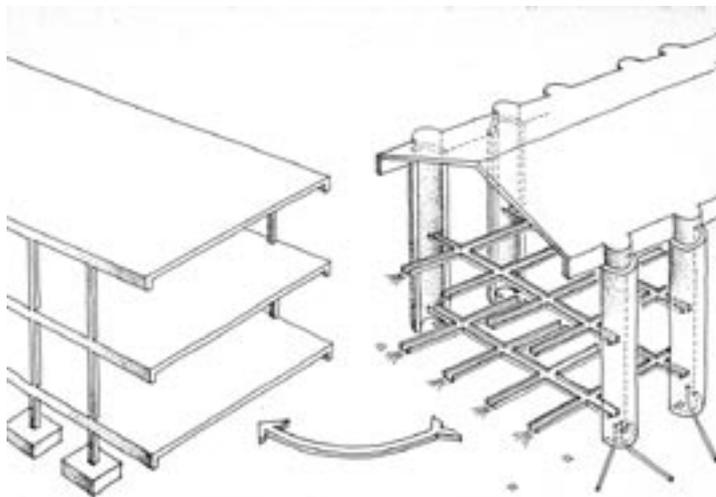
Stripping off the 'vener of invisibility', we found just enough underneath the dumbed-down 20C 'mask of minimalism' to justify the term 'refurbishment'.



In 1983 these 20-year-old, Architect-designed buildings, had so little strength the floor sagged under filing-cabinets. There was no heat or sound insulation and no sunscreening.



Keeping their structural frame, drainage and landscaping allowed four months to be cut from the construction timeline. So they were stripped-down and re-clad.

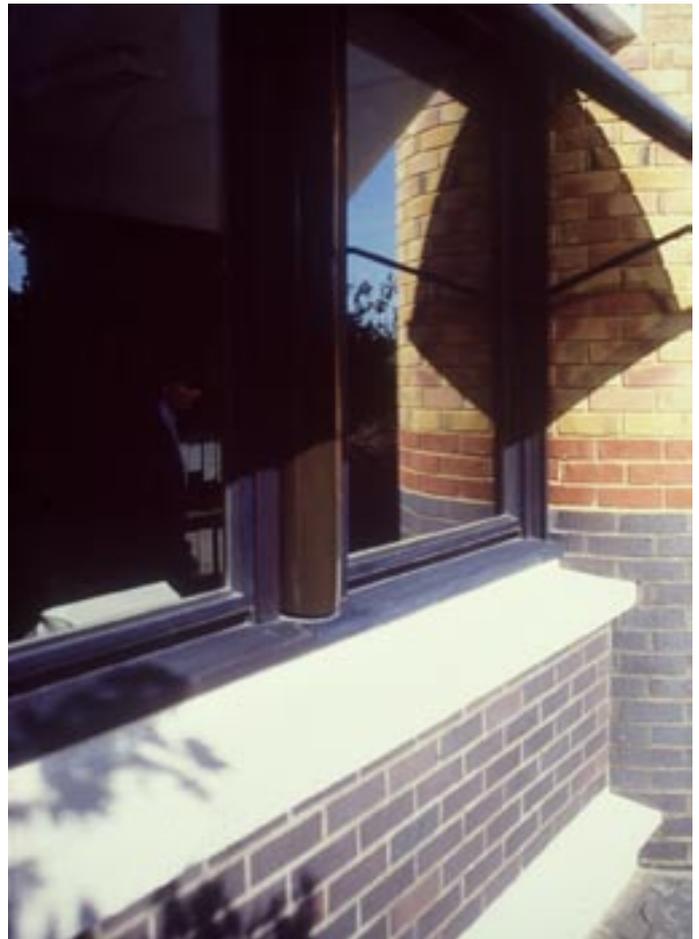
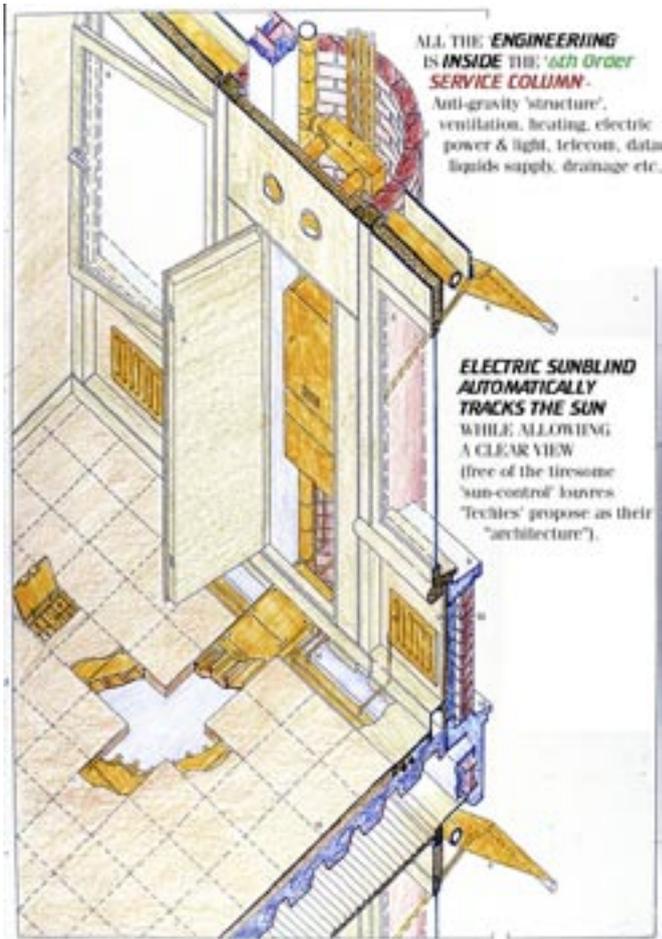


Post-war (really mechanised) architecture overcladding the 'crystal cube', epiphanically shy, pre-war Modernism of the 'Heroic' period. Monumental 'realism' overtook the Welfare Minimalism that sought escape from the 'Ethics of Matter'. Tuttle, the plumber from the film 'Brazil', revealed how the clerkly hero lived 'ethically unaware' of the machines, and behind them, the mechanics, that supported his lifestyle.



Harp Heating sold wall-hung boilers and fitted out a three-up, three-down 'semi' in seven days. The plumbers who picked up their 'kits' recognised these capitals as gas jets. Capitals 'badge' columns, like faces 'badge' bodies. The 'iconic' fins unbolt for the next owner. It is not only easy, but necessary, to combine the 'popular' with the arcane. How else to spawn a lively novelty?

WITH '6TH ORDER' ARCHITECTURE ONE JUST DECIDES WHAT TO BUILD, (NEVER EASY), DRAWS A LINE AROUND IT, AND MAKES ARCHITECTURE - AUTOMATICALLY. IT WAS THE SAME WITH ANY EFFECTIVE ARCHITECTURAL SYSTEM - OF THE 'PAST'.



The pre-fabricated inner skin goes on first, including the windows and duct doors. This achieves rainproofing. Then come the services and the interior fit-out. Last of all, off the critical path, is the brick and art stone overcladding, laid by hand, off external scaffolding.

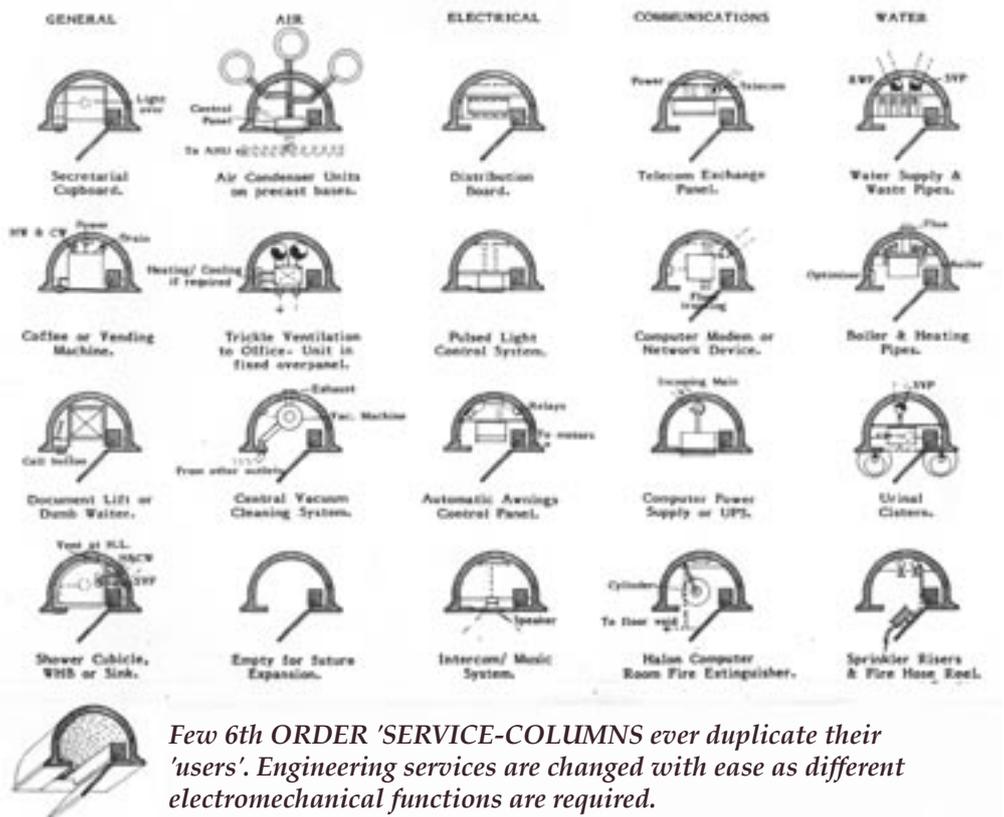
Always put the glass on the centreline of a round column - the cylinder is 'completed' by its reflection. JOA commissioned a logic circuit to make the blind track the sun via a photocell on the hollow steel mullion. In 1985 this was an industry first for Britain.

THE 'SERVICE ORDER COLUMN' version of the 6th ORDER has never had a 'hernia' in 30 years and 40 projects.

The protruding 'service' columns block low morning and evening sun from entering 'under' the sunblind.

Conversely, when pale-coloured, the column-flanks reflect light inside

- as do the deep white window sills.



Few 6th ORDER 'SERVICE-COLUMNS' ever duplicate their 'users'. Engineering services are changed with ease as different electromechanical functions are required.

AFTERWORD for the FIRST LECTURE: 'BREAKING THE TABOOS'.

When Bob Maxwell, my sixth-year Tutor, now Dean Emeritus of Princeton Architectural Faculty, wrote, in 1995: "Outram has broken the Taboos of Modernity" I could not imagine why he used this hyperbolic expression. Bob authored a biography of James Stirling - another, less amiable, Tutor from my second and third years. Bob was of an older generation than I. But, more importantly, by making his main career in Education and Criticism he knew better than I the cycles of fashion that rotate who, and what, is 'in' and 'out'. So it was only gradually, as JOA's projects became larger, and built for more prominent Clients, that I became persuaded of the truth of Maxwell's judgment.

Yet it was neither JOA's Clients, nor the Public, that confirmed Bob's amiable revelation. Maxwell himself pronounced no anathema upon my hubris. He seemed, rather, to commiserate with an enterprise which he titled "an impossible dream" which was destined, by implication, to failure. But why should he have thought so when everything already stood in Cambridge? Perhaps it was because the only class of persons who agreed with him were the Professors of Architecture who pretended to train the Practitioners of the Future.

JOA's principal crime, it gradually became clear, was a transgression so grave that, like any truly appalling wickedness, it lay well below the conscious apprehension. We had resurrected, like some ghastly Frankenstein, the whole apparatus of an 'Architecture' which, after WWII, had been pronounced safely dead, buried and consigned to 'History'.

Yet I believed us to be innocent. Had not I, back in the late 1950's and early 1960's, been guided by Saussure and Chomsky, not to mention Levi-Strauss and the Architectural genius of Louis Kahn? Where was the raging iconoclast in an Architect who always built pitched roofs and walls, like Kahn, mainly of tile and brick? No, JOA's crime, as put by Michael Graves, in Texas, was "to go too far". JOA had not played with merely 'referencing' an Architectural Order as the two Venturis had. We had, instead, re-animated an entirely novel 'Trabeated Order' with MACHINERY - the intravenous elixir of the 20C!

From this consistently-followed action had sprung a revitalised 'Entablature' carrying an entity that 'made sense of the pyra-pediment'. I had renovated the Classical figure of the Hypostyle showing the dependence, literally, of Mies van der Rohe upon its 'buried meanings'. Finally, JOA had used this Frankensteinian Apparition to power into existence a renovated decoration of huge scale and iconic power that I had the temerity to title 'iconic engineering'. Moreover these graphical arrays flouted Clement Geenberg's commandment to eschew any 'meaning'. They were, instead, prolix with diverse iconic narratives.

The 'taboos were broken'. 'Quid Tum' - What then?

